

Christian Gerlach and the "Extermination Camp" at Mogilev

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Christian Gerlach's article, "Failure of Plans for an SS Extermination Camp in Mogilev, Byelorussia"^[1] is a typical example of the historically baseless conclusions reached by Holocaust historians due to their technical ignorance, particularly in the field of crematory ovens and cremation.

The article attempts to deduce an intention, on the part of the SS, to create an extermination camp for Western European Jews at Mogilev (Byelorussia), in late 1941, according to a nonsensical technical conjecture, upon which – in order to justify his hypothesis – the author then constructs a series of inconsistent historical conjectures spiced with misleading interpretations.

The article notes that Hitler ordered the deportation of German Jews to the East by mid-September 1941 and comments:

"It is not clear if the German leadership actually intended to resettle the Jews as it had before or whether the phrase 'sending the Jews to the East' had now become a code for murdering them. In fact, some Jews deported in the Soviet Union (all who came to Kaunas, one entire transport to Riga) were murdered in 1941, whereas the others – brought to Riga, Minsk, Lodz and to the Lublin district – survived for several months, a few until 1943 and 1944." (pp. 60-61)

In fact, this explanation is utterly incompatible with any plan for the total extermination of the Jews launched as early as September 1941.

Gerlach continues:

"At the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, Heydrich indicated that forced labor was only a temporary placement for some European Jews; all were to be murdered in the end." (p. 61)

To demonstrate the presumed homicidal intention, Gerlach, in the related footnote, cites the well-known passage from the Wannsee Protocol:

"Unter entsprechender Leitung sollen nun im Zuge der Endlösung die Juden in geeigneter Weise im Osten zum Arbeitseinsatz kommen.. \. [OMITTED: in großen Arbeitskolonnen, unter Trennung der Geschlechter, werden die arbeitsfähigen Juden straßenbauend in diese Gebiete geführt] wobei zweifellos ein Großteil durch natürliche Verminderung ausfallen wird. Der allfällig verbleibende Restbestand wird, da es sich zweifellos um den widerstandsfähigsten Teil handelt, entsprechend behandelt werden müssen.. \. [OMITTED: da dieser, eine natürliche Auslese darstellend, bei Freilassung als Keimzelle eines neuen jüdischen Aufbaues anzusprechen ist. (Siehe die Erfahrung der Geschichte)]" (note 6 on p. 70).

The complete passage, translated into English, is as follows. Gerlach simply omits the underlined sentences set off by square brackets.

"Under appropriate supervision, in the course of the final solution the Jews are to be allocated for appropriate labor in the East\.. [OMITTED: Able-bodied Jews, separated according to sex, will be taken in large work columns to these areas for work on roads], in the course of which action doubtless a large portion will be eliminated by natural causes. The possible final remnant will, since it will undoubtedly consist of the most resistant portion, have to be treated accordingly [OMITTED: because as a product of

[natural selection these would, if released, act as the kernel of a new Jewish resurgence \(see the experience of history.\)](#) (note 6 on p. 70).

It is obvious that these passages were not omitted by accident; rather, the omissions are intended to lead readers to believe that the expression 'treated accordingly' (*entsprechend behandelt*) means killing. In reality, as I have documented elsewhere,^[2] the actual meaning of the passage is quite different: it means that those Jews remaining after the natural reduction (*natürliche Verminderung*) would, upon their release (*bei Freilassung*) then constitute the kernel of a new Jewish resurgence (*Keimzelle eines neuen jüdischen Aufbaues*) and should, therefore, not be released. In fact, however, the opposite of "release" is not [necessarily] "murder" but (possibly, or even likely), "continued detention."

The omissions concealed by Gerlach therefore prove that he was well aware that this is the correct interpretation.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-138-1084-24
Foto: Kessler, Rudolf | Juli 1941

Registration of the population of Mogilev, July 1941.

Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-138-1084-24 / Kessler, Rudolf / CC-BY-SA [CC-BY-SA-3.0-de (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/de/deed.en>)], via Wikimedia Commons

He then sets forth the central argument of his article:

"During recent years surprising new revelations have emerged about activities of the SS in the Byelorussian city of Mogilev. [3] Jean-Claude Pressac has shown that, in mid-November 1941, the Topf Company of Erfurt received a commission to construct a huge crematorium at Mogilev; the order came from Amt II of the SS Main Office for Budget and Building (Hauptamt Haushalt und Bauten). On

December 30, 1941, an oven with four cremation chambers was delivered and assembled. Three more ovens were available by August 1942 for delivery to Mogilev and were then 'diverted' to Auschwitz. The SS Building Administration of 'Russia Center' already had paid most of the money for all these ovens." (p. 61)

Gerlach, therefore, raises the following objection to Pressac's hypothesis that the crematorium at Mogilev "was to dispose of the bodies of those German soldiers and Soviet POWs who had died of typhoid fever":

"Out of 300-400,000 soldiers in December 1941, 252 soldiers and officers fell sick with typhoid fever, 150 more in January, 161 in February, and 27 in the first half of March 1942, most of them guards of POW camps. During the same period there were 4,907, 4,270, 3,776 and 648 cases among Soviet POWs, and roughly as many among Soviet civilians from that area. [...] The death rate among Soviets in POW Camp Dulag 185 in Mogilev in December 1941 was noticeably lower than in other camps: 50 per day." (p. 61)

At this point, Gerlach introduces the nonsensical technical conjecture constituting the linchpin of his entire article:

"But the estimated capacity of the crematorium the SS had ordered was more than 3,000 corpses a day." (p. 61)

Hence the "logical" conclusion:

"An epidemic of typhoid fever was not the reason for constructing a crematorium in Mogilev. Rather, the crematorium was connected with the relatively unknown SS labor and extermination camp in that city." (p. 62)

The presumed crematory capacity of 3,000 bodies a day, therefore, is alleged to prove that the SS intended to create an extermination camp at Minsk.

This conclusion is technically nonsensical and historically false.

Let us begin with Pressac's "surprising new revelations."

On 4 December 1941, the *Hauptamt Haushalt und Bauten* at Berlin ordered from Topf four double 4-muffle crematory ovens (*4 Stück Doppel-Topf-4-Muffeleinäscherungsöfen*), that is, 4 double 4-muffle ovens" (4 eight-muffle crematory ovens, for a total of 32 muffles), for Mogilev.^[4] Topf confirmed receipt of the order on 9 December, but only sent half of one such oven (since the complete oven had 2 x 4 = 8 muffles), i.e., 4 muffles, on 30 December.

In receipt of the proposal filed on 19 August 1942 by Topf engineer Kurt Prüfer during his visit to Auschwitz, the *SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*, on 26 August, ordered the shipment to Auschwitz of two ovens based on the Mogilev order.

Of the 4 ovens ordered, one half of one oven (i.e., 4 muffles) – as stated above – were delivered to Mogilev, 2 ovens with a total of 16 muffles, to Auschwitz and the remaining one and one half ovens were stored for disposition by the *Reichsführer-SS* in the Topf warehouses.^[5]

In consequence of the letter from Topf dated 7 July 1943, the remaining one and a half ovens (8 + 4 muffles) were drawn down by the *SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*. On 16 August, the *SS-*

Wirtschaftler (the SS official responsible for commercial enterprises) at the *Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer* of the General Gouvernement sent the *Zentralbauleitungen der Waffen SS und Polizei* of Heidelberg, Cracow, Lemberg, Lublin and Warsaw, and the Neubauleitung of Radom a note informing them that: "Office CIII has at this time one and a half crematory ovens available = 12 muffles (= 8 + 4)" (*Dem Amt CIII stehen z.Z. 1 ½ Einäscherungsofen = 12 Muffeln zur Verfügung*), asking the above mentioned offices to let him know by 1 September whether they needed them. [6]

As for the payment for the ovens, Rudolf Jährling, the civilian employee forming part of the Auschwitz *Zentralbauleitung*, unequivocally clarified something – apparently garbled in an earlier rendition – which had misled even Pressac himself. Jährling made two hand-written annotations, one dated 31 January, the other dated 21 February 1944, on the copy of the letter from the *Bauinspektion Russland-Mitte* dated 2 June 1943 received by the *Zentralbauleitung*, in which he explained that the SS had ordered 4 ovens with 8 muffles (each), costing a total of 55,200 RM; the *Bauinspektion Russland-Mitte* had already paid Topf 42,600 RM on account, followed by the addition – on 7 February 1944 – by the *SS-Standortverwaltung* of Auschwitz, of another part payment of 10,000 RM, [7] as a result of which Topf was still entitled to 2,600 RM. [8] The oven-and-a-half stored in the Topf warehouses were therefore, for all intents and purposes, the contractual property of the *Reichsführer-SS*.

Now let us consider the question of the crematory ovens at Mogilev.

As noted above, Gerlach attributes "an estimated capacity" of 3,000 bodies per day to the 4 ovens, [each] with 8 muffles (for a total of 32 muffles), intended for Mogilev. What is the source of this estimate? Gerlach, in support of this claim, refers to pages 34 and 40 of Pressac's book, *Die Krematorien von Auschwitz (The Crematoria of Auschwitz)*, note 14 on p. 71). But Pressac says nothing here about the crematory capacity of the Mogilev ovens. Rather, he adduces the presumed crematory capacity of the 2 ovens. [Each] with 8 muffles (for a total 16 muffles), installed in crematoria IV and V at Birkenau, making a distinction between theoretical capacity, 768 bodies per day each, and the "effective" capacity of 500 bodies. [9] Gerlach therefore uses the theoretical figure instead of the "effective" one: $768 \times 4 = 3,072$ or approximately 3,000.

But the crematory capacity estimated by Pressac is technically baseless.

The 8-muffle ovens were designed for Mogilev, where coke was difficult to procure, and were therefore equipped with wood-burning fire boxes (*Holzfeuerungen*) without doors, which Topf, for the ovens sent to Auschwitz, had adapted to coke-burning grates using sloping and horizontal short-beam bars. In view of the very short useful life of the sloping short-beams, Topf advised the *Zentralbauleitung* to order grate bars intended for reserve coke and refractory-clad furnace doors. Due to transport problems, moreover, the ovens for Mogilev were not insulated; Topf was prepared to supply the insulation material at the specific request of the *Zentralbauleitung*. [10]

In conformity with the proposal by Topf dated 2 September 1942, concerning the change in the fueling of the ovens and resulting changes, on 15 September the *Zentralbauleitung* ordered 4 cast iron doors (*gusseiserne Türen*) for the fire boxes, and, to insulate the 2 ovens, 2,500 insulating bricks (*Isoliersteine*), 600 kg of rock wool (*Schlackenwolle*) for each oven, in addition to the spare short-beams for the gas-generator furnaces, at a price of 3,258 RM. [11] Naturally, since the 2 ovens had 8 gas generators, there were also 8 fire box doors, and not 4, as hastily rectified by Topf. [12]

Pressac was well aware of this problem, which he summarized as follows:

"This oven was a field design, which was greatly simplified. As desired by the Bauleitung of Mogilev, it was wood-fired, since coke was rare in the region. The generators had no doors, and the oven was not thermally insulated on the interior, since these parts would have been very heavy to transport." [13]

In reality, the 8-muffle ovens at Birkenau were capable of cremating no more than 160 bodies per day (per day total), i.e., a cremation rate of one body per muffle per hour, for a twenty-hour working day, [14] (8 muffles x 1 corpse per hour x 20 hours = 160.)

With regard to the Mogilev ovens, it was quite a different story, since the use of wood for fuel (coke has a calorific value at least double that of seasoned wood) and the absence of thermal insulation and fire box furnace doors (with the consequent enormous increase in heat loss by irradiation and conduction) would have seriously affected cremation economy, including cremation times, drastically increasing the duration of cremation.

What is more, only one half oven, i.e., 4 muffles, was ever sent to Mogilev, which means that, even under the most favorable circumstances, the crematory capacity of the installation would have been 80 bodies per day (20 hours), in reality, less than one third as many. This is fully compatible with Pressac's hypothesis that the ovens were (only) used for the victims of typhoid fever.

In practice, Gerlach assumes asserts a crematory cremation capacity for the Mogilev ovens 50 times greater than that which was actually available, destroying the basis for his conjectures on the presumed extermination camp in that locality.

In this regard, he writes:

"One hint of this project emerged on October 10 [1941] at a conference in Prague on 'Jewish questions' in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. During the meeting Heydrich stated that the heads of Einsatzgruppen B and C, SS-Brigadeführer Nebe und Rasch, could take Jews into the camps for communist prisoners in the operational area. According to [a] statement from SS-Sturmbannführer Eichmann this is already being done [eingeleitet]." (p. 62)

In reality, this document only speaks of deportations to the East and of the arrival of the deportees to the appropriate camps, without even the vaguest mention of any extermination:

"Difficulties arose due to the evacuation. It was therefore expected to begin on about 15 October, in order to get the transports rolling gradually by 15 November, reaching a maximum of about 5,000 Jews (no precise information as to time period) – just from Prague. For the time being, much consideration must be given to the officials at Litzmannstadt. Minsk und Riga are to receive 50,000 [...]."

(Wegen der Evakuierung entstanden Schwierigkeiten. Es war vorgesehen, damit am 15. Oktober etwa zu beginnen, um die Transporte nach und nach bis zum 15. November abrollen zu lassen bis zur Höhe von etwa 5000 Juden – nur aus Prag. Vorläufig muss noch viel Rücksicht auf die Litzmannstädter Behörden genommen werden. Minsk und Riga sollen 50000 bekommen. [...])

"5,000 Jews will now be evacuated from Prague in the next few weeks. SS Brigade Leaders Nebe and Rasch could include Jews in the camps for Communist inmates in the operational area. This is already being done, according to Sturmbannführer Eichmann." [15]

(In den nächsten Wochen sollen 5000 Juden aus Prag nun evakuiert werden. SS-Brif. [Brigadeführer] Nebe und Rasch könnten in die Lager für kommunistische Häftlinge im Operationsgebiet Juden mit hineinnehmen. Dies ist bereits nach Angabe von SS-Stubaf. [Sturmbannführer] Eichmann eingeleitet.)[\[16\]](#)

It should be noted in passing that this program is fully compatible with the content of the Wannsee Protocol:

"The evacuated Jews will first be sent, group by group, to so-called transit ghettos, from which they will be transported to the East."[\[17\]](#)

This is also confirmed by the telegram from Georg Leibbrandt, leader of the Political Division in Rosenberg's Ministry, as *Reichskommissar für das Ostland*, Heinrich Lohse, dated 9 November 1941, "on Jewish transports to the East."

"Full details in the post. Jews are being shipped further and further East. Camps in Riga and Minsk only temporary measures, therefore no objections here."

(Genaues Schreiben unterwegs. Juden kommen weiter nach Osten. Lager in Riga und Minsk nur vorläufige Massnahme, daher hier keine Bedenken.)[\[18\]](#)

On the same day, Lohse sent Rosenberg the following secret telegram:

"Security Police report transport of 50,000 Jews to the East. Arrival of first transport in Minsk 10.11., in Riga 19.11. Urgent: please defer transports, since the Jewish camps are to be transferred considerably further east."[\[19\]](#) [\[20\]](#)

"It is a good thing for fear that we are exterminating the Jews to travel on ahead of us." (p. 64)

Thus, mention of a mere "fear" amounts, "in fact", to a confession!

Gerlach then produces the following as additional proof:

"Mogilev is linked to another aspect of German extermination policy. In September 1941 a notorious killing experiment with exhaust gasses took place there under the command of the head of Einsatzgruppe B, Arthur Nebe."(p. 64)

He adds that, at the time, there were "two gassing experiments, one at Mogilev and one at Minsk." (p. 65) These presumed experiments are said to have been performed in compliance with the order to find more humane methods of execution than shooting, issued by Himmler to Nebe during his visit to Minsk in August 1941. But this anecdote is based solely on post-war testimonies, beginning with that of Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, who had been *Höherer SS-und Polizeiführer* in Russia. Similarly, even the presumed gassing experiments – using pipes connected to motor vehicles – are attested to solely by more or less unreliable witnesses, as demonstrated in my studies "Il campo di Chelmno tra storia and propaganda" (Effepi, Genoa, 2009), the American English translation edition of which is now in preparation under the title *Chelmno: Myth and Reality*, and "Schiffbruch. Vom Untergang der Holocaust-Orthodoxie" (Castle-Hill Publishers).

In the end, after two pages of conjecture, Gerlach is compelled to admit that "the SS apparently did not give up the idea of an extensive extermination in camp in Mogilew until 1942, when the crematoria

intended for Mogilev were delivered to Auschwitz" and that "it seems that a gas chamber in Mogilev never existed," (p. 68) Mogilev was not, therefore, even a Jewish extermination camp! He then informs us that "instead, three gas vans were at that time located in the city, as in February 1942. This is proven by a newly found report of the Einsatzgruppe B." (p. 68) In the related note, Gerlach claims that, according to the "*Tätigkeits- und Lagebericht der Einsatzgruppe B für die Zeit vom 16. bis 28 Februar, of 1 March 1942,*" on 23 February 1942 this Einsatzgruppe received two large "Gaswagen." (note 83 on p. 77) It only remains to be established whether these vehicles were the presumed homicidal gassing vehicles, or mere gas-generator vehicles (*Generatorgaswagen*) or producer-gas vehicles (*Holzgaswagen*), referred to, for purposes of brevity, as *Gaswagen*, vehicles operating on gas produced by gas generators. [21] Incidentally, the term "Gaswagen," as a homicidal gassing vehicle, gas van, only entered the language after the war; the documents mentioned in support of the reality of the presumed homicidal gassing vehicles were in fact referred to as *Sonder-Wagen, Sonderfahrzeugen, Spezialwagen* or *SWagen*. As documented by myself in the book *Schiffbruch. Vom Untergang der Holocaust-Orthodoxie*, one of the above -mentioned vehicles was sent to Auschwitz in September 1944 and was, in reality, a gas -generator vehicle. The document cited by Gerlach has also been discussed by Santiago Alvarez. [22]

Gerlach then mentions the victims at Mogilev: "at once up to 4,000 people were said to be killed;" (p. 68) that is, for a total of 25,000-30,000 civilians between 1941 and 1942 (p. 69), but the sources are merely witness testimonies made several years after the war before the Soviet War Crimes Commission investigating German crimes at Mogilev (notes 89, 91 and 92, p. 78)! Here as well, there is not the slightest trace of any real documents.

Gerlach concludes as follows:

"Although there can be doubts about some details, it is at least probable that the SS intended in autumn 1941 to send part of European Jewry to Mogilev to kill them there. Mogilev was one option; others were Lodz, Riga, and Minsk, precisely as mentioned during the conference in Prague on 10 October." (p. 69)

To return to reality, Gerlach's inane conjectures are based on an audacious egregious distortion of the facts: the SS plan to deport Western European Jews to the transitory ghettos (*Durchgangsghettos*) of Riga and Minsk as a temporary measure (*vorläufige Massnahme*) prior to transporting them further east (*weiter nach dem Osten*) and the delivery of 4 muffles to Mogilev with a crematory capacity well below 80 bodies a day!

This is how the Holocaust historians write "history."

Notes:

Translated by Carlos W. Porter

[1] In: "Holocaust and Genocide Studies", Spring 1997, pp. 60-78.

[2] "Leugnung der Geschichte"? - "Leugnung der Geschichte"? - Leugnung der Beweise!
Teil 2. Keine "Beweiskonvergenz" in Holocaust. Antwort an M. Shermer und A.

Grobman, in: VffG, 8 jg., Heft 3, November 2004, pp. 299-301 (“Das Wannsee-Protokoll”)

- [3] Gerlach writes “Mogilëv”.
- [4] Letter from the HHB to Topf dated 4 December 1941. RGVA (Russian National War Archives, Moscow) 502-1-327, pp. 47-48.
- [5] Letter from Topf to the *Zentralbauleitung* dated 7 July 1943. RGVA, 502-1-327, pp. 43-45.
- [6] WAPL (Lublin National Provincial Archives), *Zentralbauleitung*, 268, p. 132. See document 166.
- [7] WAPL (Lublin National Provincial Archives), *Zentralbauleitung*, 268, p. 132. See document 166.
- [8] *Zentralbauleitung, Abschlagszahlung Nr. 1* dated 1 February 1944. RGVA, 502-1-310, pp. 16-16a.
- [9] Letter from the *Leiter der Gruppe C Baugruppe* of the *Höherer SS-und Polizeiführer Russland-Mitte* to the *Bauinspektion der Waffen-SS und Polizei Reich-Ost* of 2 June 1943 and handwritten notes by the civilian employee Jährling dated 31 January and 21 February 1944. RGVA, 502-1-314, pp. 36-36a.
- [10] J.-C. Pressac, *Die Krematorien von Auschwitz. Die Technik des Massenmordes*. Piper, Munich-Zürich, 1994, p. 164.
- [11] Letter from Topf to the *Zentralbauleitung* dated 31 August 1942. RGVA, 502-1-313, p. 150.
- [12] Letter from the *Zentralbauleitung* to Topf dated 15 September 1942. RGVA, 502-1-312, p. 22; letter from Topf to the *Zentralbauleitung* dated 22 September 1942. RGVA, 502-1-313, pp. 127-127a.
- [13] Letter from Topf to the *Zentralbauleitung* of 30 September 1942. RGVA, 502-1-313, p. 118.
- [14] J.-C. Pressac, *Die Krematorien von Auschwitz. Die Technik des Massenmordes*, op. cit., pp. 40-41.
- [15] Notes on the conference of 10.10.41 on the solution to the Jewish question. T 37/299. Transcribed in: Miroslav Kryl, *Deportacja więźniów terezynskiego getta do obozu koncentracyjnego na Majdanku w 1942 roku*, in: “Zeszyty Majdanka”, XI, 1983, pp. 38-41.

- [16] See my study *Auschwitz: The Case for Sanity*. Published by The Barnes Review, Washington, 2010, pp. 282-289.
- [17] NG-2586-G. Photocopy of the original in R.M. Kempner, *Eichmann und Komplizen*, Europa Verlag, Zurich-Stuttgart-Vienna, 1961, pp. 133-147, p. 8 of the original.
- [18] GARF (National Archives of the Russian Federation, Moscow), 7445-2-145, p. 54.
- [19] GARF, 7445-2-145, p. 52.
- [20] Adolf Hitler, *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941-1944*. Albrecht Knaus, Hamburg, 1980, p. 106.
- [21] F. P. Berg, *Diesel Gas Chambers: Ideal for Torture - Absurd for Murder*, in: G. Rudolf (Ed.), *Dissecting the Holocaust. The Growing Critique of "Truth" and "Memory"*. Theses & Dissertations Press, Chicago, 2003, pp. 460-461.
- [22] Santiago Alvarez, Pierre Marais, *The Gas Vans. A Critical Investigation*. Published by The Barnes Review, Washington, 2011, pp. 92-94. The document is reproduced on pp. 343-344.

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